

## **SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The purpose of social evaluations is to provide information to decision makers. NRCS provides assistance to protect, maintain, and improve soil, water, air, plants, animals, and human resources. Social and cultural considerations are a part of this assistance. Social evaluations are conducted by the NRCS to ensure optimum service to customers and to meet the requirements of the law, executive orders, administrative decisions, and directives.

Social evaluation attempts to identify the effects, both positive and negative, of specific practices in a conservation system on the quality of life and social well being. Social evaluation provides a basis for minimizing adverse effects and maximizing beneficial effects during the planning of a conservation system.

In order to do a social evaluation of a practice or system of practices the planner must first identify the significant social variables that pertain to the activity. Be aware that as more information becomes available, social variables may change. All social variables should be monitored throughout the conservation planning process. Conservation planners should be aware of the community in which they are working. Gathering this data may be useful in watershed or area wide planning. The following list breaks down social variables into 15 categories that can be monitored to answer considerations:

- 1) Population Dynamics – size, structure (age & sex), trends, migration, distribution (racial & ethnic), etc.
- 2) Economic Base – number of businesses/farms, trends, local tax base, values of production, etc.
- 3) Income – income dispersion, sources of income, income levels of low-income households, income levels of minority households, etc.
- 4) Labor and Employment – labor force characteristics, unemployment rate, skilled/unskilled labor force, job stability, accessibility of work, etc.
- 5) Social Service and Public Assistance – population under poverty level, social services personnel, funds to county, etc.
- 6) Educational Opportunities – availability of educational services, enrollment, diversity of educational programs, educational characteristics of population, etc.
- 7) Industrial Base – agricultural land market value, acres in production, acres of agricultural land lost to other uses, industry sites available, etc.
- 8) Transportation – facilities (airstrips, roads, water, railroads, etc.), travel route difficulty, adequacy of public transportation, etc.
- 9) Local Government and Community Services – local tax base, number of local government employees, urban renewal activities, number of families served by community services, etc.
- 10) Health, Life Protection, and Safety – mortality, risk of life and/or property damage, adequacy of medical facilities and personnel, quality of medical care, potential for natural disaster, etc.
- 11) Housing – construction trends, housing quality, potential for new dwellings, median value of dwelling units, etc.

## TECHNICAL GUIDE

### SECTION III

#### State-Wide

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- 12) Recreational Opportunities – adequacy of recreation facilities, recreational participation, special access (elderly, handicapped, etc.), etc.
- 13) Community Organizations and Local Leadership – religious resources, social/fraternal organizations, major voluntary community activities, active community leaders, civic organizations, farm organizations, minority organizations, etc.
- 14) Communications and Media – media market, media availability, etc.
- 15) Social, Cultural, and Psychological Characteristics – basic values, satisfaction with quality of life, historical sites, attitude toward cultural resources, attitudes toward conservation, etc.

#### Social Effects

Social considerations can be summarized into 3 categories: client well being, community well being and environmental justice. These effects are described in qualitative terms.

Client Well Being: Client well being is an evaluation of how the conservation implementation impacts the client.

Consider the following questions to describe client well being effects:

- Are farmer attitudes toward certain conservation practices likely to affect the success of the project?
- Will there be a change in the quality of life, lifestyle, attitude, and/or behavior?
- Will social, family, or religious values be affected?
- Are farm residents likely to be affected negatively by the activity?
- Are there typical or unique characteristics of farms that may have relevance to the activity (absentee landowners, land use ethic, etc.)?
- Some characteristics (age, planning horizons, special emphasis groups, resources, etc.) are not considered during planning?
- Will change negatively affect the client's ownership/lease of the land?
- Will client tenure affect installation and management of the conservation system?
- Is time available (absentee or part-time landowner, etc.) for installation and management of the conservation system?

Community Well Being: Community well being is an evaluation of how the conservation implementation impacts the community.

Consider the following questions to describe community well being effects:

- Are people likely to be adversely affected by the activity?
- Will there be an effect on life, health, and/or safety?
  - Local community standards regarding health and safety were not followed?
  - Are there historical factors that are likely to be relevant in the proposed activity (changes in land use, farm management techniques, etc.)
  - Are there communities in the study area that would be affected adversely by the proposed activity (loss of recreation, etc.)?

- Are there community organizations, church groups, etc. that would be adversely affected by the proposed activity?
- Are there potential areas of conflict between individuals or groups within the community?
- Will community cohesion and/or stability be affected negatively?
- Will this change affect just some individuals and/or groups?
- Will this change create inequity among individuals and/or groups?

Environmental Justice: Environmental Justice has two components. Are minority or low income populations 1) provided an opportunity to comment before decisions are rendered on government actions affecting human health or the environment and 2) allowed to share in the benefits, not excluded from, and are not affected in disproportionately high and adverse manner by government programs affecting human health or the environment.

Consider the following questions do describe environment justice effects:

- Does minority or low income populations have the opportunity to comment before decisions were rendered on government actions affecting human health or the environment?
- Does minority or low income populations have a share in the benefits or are they excluded from benefits?
- Are benefits disproportionately shared by populations in the community?
- Would minority or low income populations be affected in an adverse manner by government programs affecting human health or the environment?

Documentation:

Documentation of social effects is not required. If the planner wishes to document social effects; they can be included in the conservation assistance notes or in the Effects Notes section of the NRCS-CPA-52. A copy of the NRCS-CPA-52 form and guidance on it are in the National Planning Procedures Handbook.